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EL RESIDENTE

May
June
2022

DESTINOS:

Puerto Viejo de Talamanca



ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Central Parks and Polideportivos
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CONTENTS

Across the Board ARCR Board of Directors	4
Destinos William Duckwall	5
Out and About Mitzi Stark	12
Monteverde Moments Marchall Cobb	17
A Day in the Life Allen Dickinson	20
From the Embassies US and UK Embassies	26
Legal Update Rómulo Pacheco	28
The Southern Zone Sheelagh Richards	30
The View From Downtown Michael Miller	32
Design Wise Shelagh Duncan	36
Paradise, We Have a Problem Tony Johnson	41
Club Corner	45
Business Directory	47

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Editor's Note

The health restrictions are relaxing, and now that you have a little more freedom to move about, what should you do with it? Mary Ann Stark gives some local options in *Out and About*, and in *Destinos* William Duckwall offers information about a longer trip to visit a portion of the country to which you might have been reluctant to travel.

Or, if your pleasure involves simply staying at home, *Design Wise* by Shelagh Duncan gives a tip on how to make that an even more pleasant experience.

If local art is one of your interests, sadly there is one place that you can no longer visit. Michael Miller commemorates the loss of a premier Costa Rican cultural site in San José. You can read about the closing of an iconic hotel in *The View From Downtown*.

Plus, there is the usual informative article here too, just turn the pages.

And remember, wherever you choose to go, whatever you see fit to do, the rules for face masks, hand washing, and social distancing are still in force. Stay healthy!



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ACROSS THE BOARD

Notes and News from the Board of Directors

OLD NEWS The mandatory COVID-19 health pass requirement to enter public places has been discontinued. The Costa Rican Ministry of Health has declared that the mandatory presentation of a COVID-19 health pass as a requirement was ended as of Friday, April 1, 2022. After that date, no business or public establishment must require a COVID-19 pass as a prerequisite to enter, but only 50% of the occupancy limit will be permitted inside. Establishments may allow 100% of the public to enter if they require and verify a COVID-19 pass from all patrons. The sanitary guidelines – hand washing and wearing a face mask inside the businesses, with the exception of restaurants, and keeping six feet social distance – continue to be mandatory.

WHAT IS A “SELE”? The game most North Americans calls soccer, known as fútbol elsewhere in the world, is a fixture here, as anyone who ever turned on a TV knows. The premier event of the sport, called the World Cup, is a competition that pits teams from countries all over the world to determine the best. The national teams are made up of players which play for their home nationality, even though they may be employed and play for another team on a regular basis in another country. The national teams are called “The Selection” or “Sele.” The World Cup takes place every four years, and 2022 is the year of the next tournament. The ultimate games will be held in Qatar from November 21 to December 18 (the time of the year was picked to minimize the effect of the heat there), and the qualifying games are already in process, which means we’ll be hearing the word Sele a lot during the coming months. (Thanks to Bob Normand of the *Golden Gringo Chronicles* for this information.)

THANKSGIVING The Costa Rican Congress has approved (in a first debate) a law to declare the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving Day. The day will not be a holiday for Costa Ricans. Though not all Costa Ricans comprehend the history behind the tradition of the day, the bill’s proponents hope that commemorating the day will encourage all people to be grateful and rejoice and will strengthen family values.

U.S. PASSPORT RENEWAL UPDATE On March 21, 2022, the U.S. Department of State via the Embassy in San José made the following announcement:

The Department of State is pleased to announce that U.S. Embassy San José will begin supporting online payment for DS-82 passport renewal fees. Qualified applicants will no longer need to make an interview appointment at the U.S. Embassy. Beginning March 21, 2022, passport applicants wishing to pay for their DS-82 renewal application online

may visit <https://cr.usembassy.gov/u-s-citizen-services/passports/online-fee-payment/> to determine eligibility to use this option. If eligible, applicants may then submit payment via U.S. or international credit or debit card, electronic funds transfer from a U.S.-based bank account, Amazon Pay, or Pay Pal. For questions about this online fee payment option, please contact the American Citizen Services unit at ACSSANJOSE@state.gov

TRAVELERS BEWARE! The U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has released the following information:

‘Juice Jacking’: The Dangers of Public USB Charging Stations Planning to travel? No doubt you’ll have your cell phone or another portable device with you and you’ll need to re-charge it at some point. If your battery is running low, be aware that juicing up your electronic device at free USB port charging stations, such as those found near airport gates, in hotels and other travel-friendly locations, could have unfortunate consequences. You could become a victim of “juice jacking,” a new cyber-theft tactic.

Cybersecurity experts have warned that criminals can load malware onto public USB charging stations to maliciously access electronic devices while they are being charged. Malware installed through a dirty USB port can lock a device or export personal data and passwords directly to the perpetrator. Criminals can use that information to access online accounts or sell it to other bad actors. In some cases, criminals have left cables plugged in at the stations. Fraudsters may even give you infected cables as a promotional gift, according to a New York Times story.

Don’t let a free USB charge wind up draining your bank account. Here are some tips to help you avoid becoming a juice jacking victim:

- Avoid using a USB charging station. Use an AC power outlet instead.

- Bring AC, car chargers, and your own USB cables with you when traveling.

- Carry a portable charger or external battery.

- Consider carrying a charging-only cable, which prevents data from sending or receiving while charging, from a trusted supplier.

Public Wi-Fi networks are another way that cyber criminals target travelers. To learn more about mobile phone and online security, check out the FCC consumer guide: Wireless Connections and Bluetooth Security Tips.

DESTINOS

by William Duckwall



Puerto Viejo de Talamanca

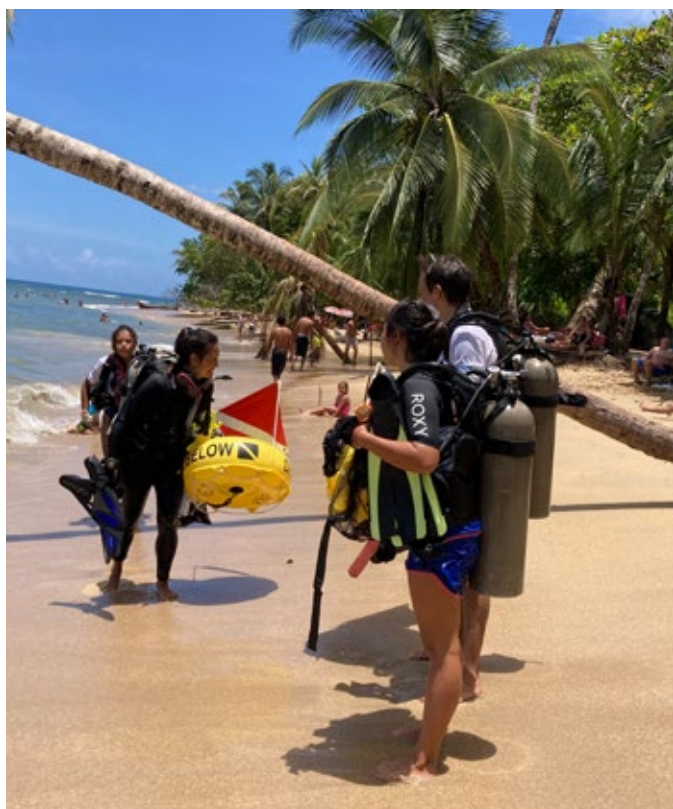
The Caribbean side of the country boasts two Puertos Viejos (Old Ports). Before the pandemic, I wrote about Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí, which is close to our home in Guápiles, and which has an ecolodge, Selva Verde, one of the oldest in Costa Rica. It is a charming spot; my wife and I love the area and will continue to take visitors there as an introduction to tropical lowland rain forests.

Puerto Viejo de Talamanca – the other Puerto Viejo – is quite different. It lies on the Caribbean coast and is near the southern border with Panama. What's different? First, it is a beach town – very much so. There's surfing, snorkeling, diving, and little beach restaurants and bars. It is laid-back yet vibrant with the energy of a younger generation.

The rainfall pattern is different there too. It has a slight lessening of rain during the spring months when San José is having its dry season (Costa Rica's "summer"). In fact,

as you travel south towards Limón, the rainfall evens out – there is no real dry season. More importantly, in the fall season, September through October, when the Pacific coast is beset by rain, rain, and more rain, the Atlantic coast has comparatively good weather. In a normal year, fall is a peak travel time as Puerto Viejo de Talamanca provides a respite from the rainy season hitting much of the rest of the country.

The most important difference, though, is the culture. The railroad from Limón to San José was built starting in 1871. The Costa Rican government hired Henry Keith, an American, to oversee the construction. Keith insisted on using black laborers for clearing the way and installing tracks and brought in workers from Jamaica. Many stayed when the work was finished, and they, together with the native Bribri, became the soul of the Caribbean coast. The food is different, the music is different, the vibe is different – all in refreshing ways.



My first visit to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca was a family vacation 16 years ago, my second visit to Costa Rica. We had a local travel agent who booked us into the Azania Bungalows, a few miles past the town center. A few things from that trip stand out in my memory:

- The road approaching the town was terrible, full of potholes (huecos). Our driver wound his way along, veering from one side of the road to the other, avoiding the worst craters. At that time, the running joke was that the police would suspect a driver of being intoxicated if they saw him driving in a straight line. I'm happy to report that the road is now beautifully paved and has been in good condition for years.
- It was hot and humid. This hasn't really changed, but I've adapted. Nowadays I would never expect a cotton T-shirt, washed in a hotel sink, to dry out hanging in the bathroom. You could dry it outside in the sun, but you'd have to be around to bring it in during rain showers. I now know that synthetic fabrics at least give you a fighting chance. On that family vacation years ago, my youngest son built a tower of furniture in our room so that he could hang his damp clothes near the ceiling fan to dry out. I hate to think what went through the staff's minds



when they came in to clean the room; it had kind of a Close Encounters feel to it.

At that time, there wasn't a lot between the Azania Bungalows and the commercial center. It was a little far to walk if you just wanted to go into town for dinner. That's all changed. The area now has a lot of little restaurants, hotels, and businesses, and Azania Bungalows is now part of the strip of commercial development. Local transportation is much improved too. There are lots of bicycle and motorcycle rentals, and there are little three-wheeled taxis, known worldwide as tuk-tuks (by worldwide, I mean Puerto Viejo, Thailand, and India). The tuk-tuks are big enough to accommodate two or three passengers and are an inexpensive way to get around.

We have visited the area again several times over the years, taking friends there a few times to let them get their toes in the sea. We've visited the beach at Punta Uva, just south of town, with Tico friends who run informal weekend excursions to local points of interest and once used it as a staging area for a longer trip to Bocas del Toro in Panama. We stayed at the Shawanda Lodge before and after the Panama trip; they let us leave our car in their secure parking lot while we took a shuttle to the Panama border at Sixaola, and then another shuttle on the Panama side down to Bocas. That sounds complicated, but it's not – there's a steady flow of people



doing the same thing, and the shuttle drivers make sure you're standing in the correct queues to cross the border smoothly.

As an engineer, I am sometimes a little single-minded (some would say clueless), and it took some time for it to sink in that Puerto Viejo de Talamanca is not like any other place in Costa Rica, not even other beach towns. My first step was becoming familiar with... rice and beans.

There is a restaurant just outside Guápiles (now operating as the Guarumo Lodge) that we visit occasionally. We would go more often, but they are on the far side of town and traffic is often a mess. I was surprised, years ago, when they put up signs on the road advertising rice and beans. I was puzzled – every restaurant in the country has rice and beans. What's the big deal?

A few months later, we happened to be headed for Puerto Viejo de Talamanca with a visiting friend on the trip that would take us on to Bocas del Toro. On the way, we stopped at a cute little restaurant, Sol y Luna (54 kilometers past Guápiles, on the ocean side of the road.) One of the entrees on the menu was rice and beans. It was priced like other entrees, about the same as having fish or chicken. I thought rice and beans must signify something more, so, trying to avoid exposing my ignorance and

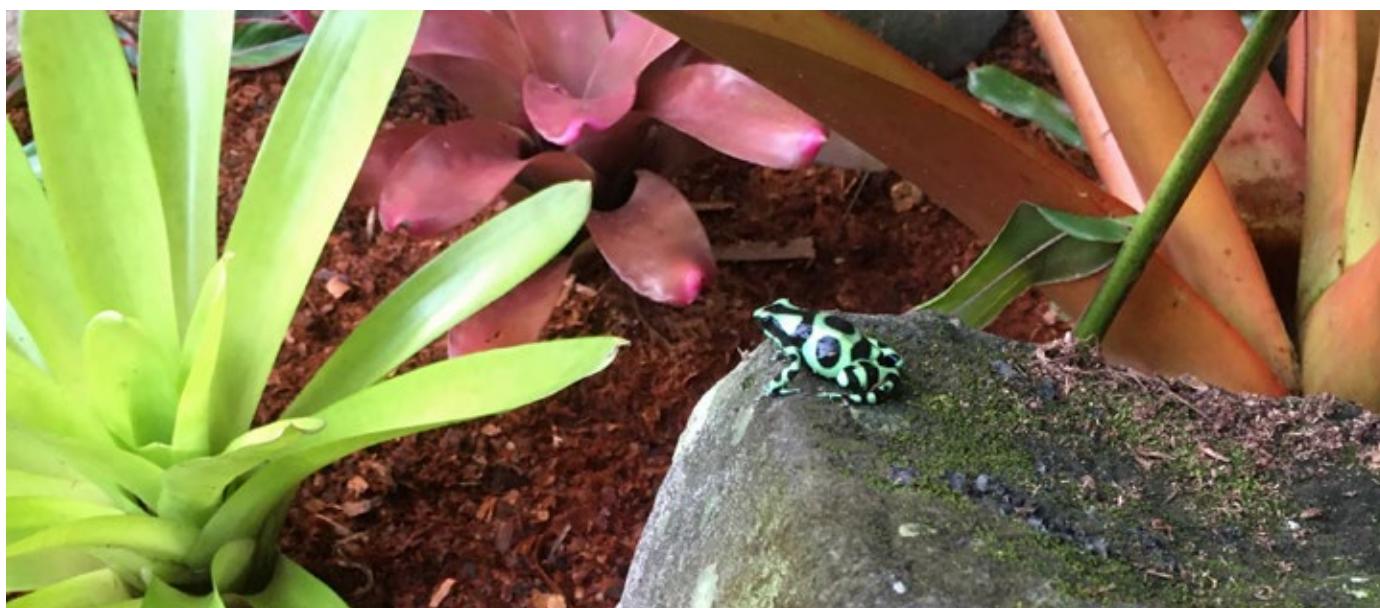
befuddlement, I ordered it, mainly to find out what it was. It had to be more than just rice and beans.

Hiding in plain sight behind a simple English name in a Spanish-speaking country is a Caribbean dish rich with coconut milk, thyme, and other spices, and with a little heat from a Panamanian pepper simmered whole in the sauce. I learned that rice and beans here includes a scoop of, yes, rice and beans, but also chicken (usually) simmered in the sauce until very tender. The sauce also flavors the rice and beans. You can expect a side salad and a few roasted maduros (sweet plantains) to come with the entrée. It is delicious!

The local Jamaicans, by the way, speak English, and both English and Spanish are commonly spoken in the area. There are two flavors of English: tourist English and Jamaican patois. The latter is as impenetrable to norteamericanos as it is to Spanish-only Ticos.

In August 2021, we returned to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca for two nights to celebrate my birthday. We stopped again at Sol y Luna on the way down, and I had rice and beans. (They have an extensive menu with lots of other options.)

Ruta 32 is something of a challenge these days. Every kilometer of the highway is under construction, being widened from two lanes to four, from the Ruta 4 junction



at the base of the mountain all the way to Limón (about 100 km), and not a single meter is actually completed. There were long stretches where the “shoulder” is three feet lower than the roadbed and other stretches where the road is nicely paved but unlined – just a vast expanse of black asphalt. There are dozens of diversions from one side of the highway to the other. Sometimes it’s a little hard to tell exactly where your traffic lane is supposed to be (and any smooth paved surface will have traffic, even if it isn’t officially open). It is all passable, but try to avoid driving at night. The ongoing construction sometimes makes it difficult to get to businesses along the way, including gas stations, so don’t let your gas get low in the stretch between Siquirres and Limón. If you can travel to Puerto Viejo on a Sunday, you’ll benefit from lighter traffic, especially fewer trucks. But try to avoid leaving Puerto Viejo on Sunday afternoon as all the weekend visitors stampede out of town then.

If I’ve scared you off driving completely, you could book a tourist van to take you down – this would be a great option, especially if you have a small group interested in going together. The public bus system also serves Puerto Viejo, just make sure you’re heading to Puerto Viejo de Talamanca and not Puerto Viejo de Sarapiquí. Once you pass Limón, it takes another hour to cover the remaining 60 km on Ruta 36 and Ruta 256 for the final few kilometers. All of this is good, smooth, two-lane highway with no major construction work.

On our August trip, we stayed again at the Shawanda Lodge. It’s a great place; each room is a separate cabin. The property has a lovely pool and many old growth



trees, including a huge ceiba. You’re likely to hear howler monkeys, known locally as congos (supposedly because of their facial resemblance to King Kong). Their morning chorus could provide you with a pleasant tropical background sound, or it could blast you out of bed, depending on how close the troop happens to be.

There are now many good places to stay in the area, but I only have firsthand knowledge of a few. I suggest using Orbitz or a similar online service to find hotels that fit your style and budget. There are usually good photos of the property and lots of customer reviews. When you settle on a place, sometimes you’ll find that booking directly is cheaper than going through an online service like Orbitz or Expedia. Some properties, like Shawanda,



have their own websites allowing you to book directly online. I booked a one-night stay in March 2022 using the Shawanda Lodge website. Checking a box for March Discount reduced the price by 25%. With other properties you may have to call. I should add that I've never had any problems booking through Orbitz, I just know that dealing directly sometimes saves a little money.

Right at the moment, March 2022, the road through the town of Puerto Viejo is under construction, with a detour onto a section of gravel road. It's only a 30-meter stretch of road, but the work manages to kick up a lot of dust. You might want to book your lodging and/or dining reservations a bit away from the town center to avoid this temporary inconvenience.

Last August, the pandemic was still in full swing, and the Shawanda restaurant was only operating for the complimentary breakfast. This turned out to be a blessing in that it forced us to try some local spots. Next door is the GypSea Café, a good place for breakfast and lunch. It is very relaxed, has more or less outdoor dining around a lushly planted courtyard, with locally sourced ingredients, and bread and baked goods made in-house. The fare will satisfy omnivores, vegans and those with dietary restrictions. (As I go over this again in March 2022, I'm happy to report that the Shawanda restaurant is up and running again; it's wonderful to see the area coming back to life.)

We celebrated my birthday last summer with a classy dinner at El Refugio, a tiny restaurant a few kilometers further along the road towards the Panama border – steaks, seafood, good wines, an Argentine cook, and glowing reviews. We met a young (to me anyway) couple at the next table: Ines from Madrid and her partner Thomas from Virginia. Ines has a website that has a concise history of the local area, from pre-Columbus to today. She's a gifted writer, and in one passage she writes of the string of events, economically somewhat catastrophic, that have shaped the area. She writes: *"Some major local and global events have prevented the Puerto Viejo area from becoming a massively exploited tourist destination. I am aware that these events have damaged many families but I feel that they have also protected the community as a whole. Puerto Viejo is definitely different from other parts of Costa Rica or other Caribbean countries. You don't find any massive resorts here and nature is breathtaking."* The history section is here, but don't stop there. Browse through the rest of

the site as well. She adds to it from time to time. <https://leaptohappiness.com/puertoviejo/briefhistory>

And finally, we had a dinner at Maxi's, nearly at the end of the road in Manzanillo. There is a legendary Caribbean soup called rondon, which we both ordered. We later mentioned our dinner at Maxi's to a Tica friend, and her eyes kind of glazed over as she thought back to her times there, a dozen years ago when she used to go with her girlfriends from college for a weekend getaway. Rondon is the Jamaican patois pronunciation of "run down," signifying that it has all the ingredients that the cook was able to run down that day. It can include a wide variety of seafoods, sometimes pork, beef, chicken, and almost certainly banana, yuca, plantain, and malanga, simmered in coconut milk with thyme, cilantro, and a little chile for heat. Rondon is to the Caribbean what gumbo is to New Orleans, and Maxi's may be the best place to try it.

Hikers will appreciate Cahuita National Park, 10 km north of Puerto Viejo. Here the trail follows the sandy coast and is all flat easy walking. You're likely to see monkeys, sloths, iguanas, basilisks, and a variety of birds. You can park worry-free in a hotel lot at the entrance to the park. The 2,000-colon parking fee is refundable if you have lunch or dinner in the hotel restaurant.

Or you can tour the Manzanillo Wildlife Refuge, about a kilometer past Maxi's. You're required to have a guide to see anything more than just the beach area near the entrance. Some of the trails are muddy, so wear shoes you can wash later. The reserve has many mature almendro trees. These are protected in Costa Rica but are rare nonetheless as they are valued for their wood, which is exceedingly hard and durable. (Reluctant to pay for a guide? In addition to pointing out wildlife that you might have missed, they are a rich source of information about local culture and history.)

Wildlife enthusiasts can visit the Jaguar Rescue Center, which ironically has no jaguars and never has. I could explain, but it's better if I leave it to your future guide at the center. They enjoy recounting the chain of events leading to the name. It is a wildlife rescue center with many species of birds and mammals, including some of the smaller cats (but no jaguars or pumas). The modest admission fee supports the animal upkeep and a very lean staff (all the guides and many of the workers are volunteers). The two-hour tour goes by very quickly. Also, consider visiting the Ara Manzanillo Green Macaw Reintroduction Station. Green macaws (lapas

verdes) depend on almendro trees for food and nesting, so this is an ideal area.

There is a farmers market in town every Saturday morning. For chocoholics, there is Caribbeans. They have a café and shop on the inland side of the main road, a little south of town. They offer a chocolate tour and a wide variety of chocolate produced from locally sourced cacao. Warning! I never manage to visit their shop without spending at least \$40.

You can find yoga classes and massages. You can visit a local spa or have a masseuse come to your hotel. Inquire at your hotel or through the internet. Or if you prefer to spend your time in the sea, there is swimming, snorkeling, and even scuba diving. There is a dive shop on the little street by Punta Uva.

For more dining options, tours, and activities, including website links, I refer you again to Ines's site: <https://leaptohappiness.com/puertoviejo/10bestthingstodoinpuertoviejo>

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OUT AND ABOUT

by Mitzi Stark



Central Parks and Polideportivos

Costa Rica is full of surprises. The other day as I was walking with my dog on our rural road, I met a man walking with a boa constrictor. He said it was his pet, that he'd had it for a year, and that he wanted to give it some sun. Another day, a funeral car stopped to ask me if I knew where the difunto (dead person) was. I sure hope they found it in time for the funeral.

Other surprises are all the activities available, for free or low cost, now that the pandemic is on the wane.

This column is dedicated to finding things to do that don't take too much time, don't cost too much, and don't use too much energy. To that I will add another criteria: not too early. The train ride to Puntarenas, with stops at old stations along the way for a history chat and a selfie, looked

like fun but lost me as a passenger when they announced the 5 a.m. departure. But central parks and polideportivos fit the bill.

Every city and town has a central park. While they differ in how elaborate they are, the majority boast benches for sitting, pigeons, and a fountain. And they are open to the public, free. Central parks for the public were first established in the 18th century when European aristocrats opened their private gardens to the public. City officials, seeing the benefits of public open spaces, established city plazas. Central American countries, recognizing a good idea, copied it. Early parks had fountains to provide water for homes that did not have running water, and some had fruit trees to give poor people something to



eat. That was the idea behind planting all those mango trees in Alajuela's central park (Alajuela is known as the City of Mangos). Unfortunately, the trees grew too tall for anybody to pick the fruit, and the fire department comes around periodically with high pressure hoses to blast them down before they fall on the parkgoers' heads.

In Costa Rica, central parks are for relaxing and meeting people. Once upon a time, they were the scene of promenades when, on Sundays after Mass, the young people spent the rest of the morning circling the park, men going one way, women the other. Flirting was the main activity. My neighbor grew up in Palmares and remembers promenading. "It was kind of silly, but fun," she says.

Today, the central park is still the place where teens from different schools meet, children get to play and feed pigeons, musicians bring their music, vendors sell snacks, trees provide shade, and the benches furnish places to sit and observe it all. At Alajuela's famous squirrel tree, generations of families came to feed the squirrels, and generations of squirrels came to eat. In San Ramon's park,



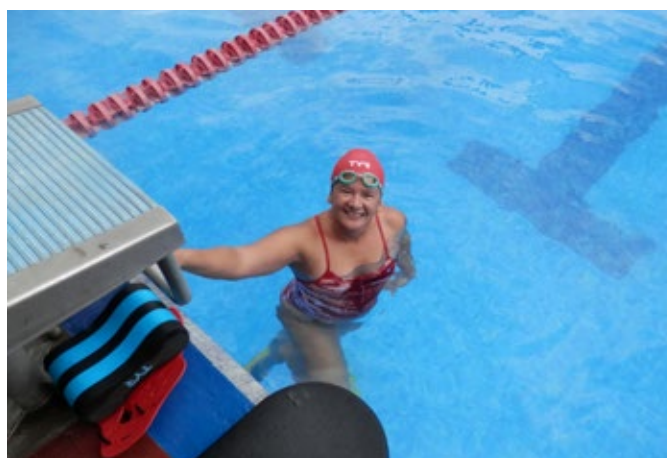
there's a mystery tree. Some people say it "bewitches," others say it's only a magnetic field. Heredia's park is surrounded by historical buildings and gardens. Sometimes you'll find fairs or demonstrations or groups promoting a product or cause in the park. All-in-all, it's a place for a restful break during the day.



Costa Rica has 71 cantons within the seven provinces, and each canton has a polideportivo, or sports complex. These sport parks were built not only to develop sports talent for the national and regional games, but also to provide ample places for the public to get some exercise. Some are simple with just a track, a soccer field, and maybe access to swimming or a gym. Others offer a wider range of activities, including aerobics and zumba, with special sessions for older adults.

Whether you like practicing a sport or prefer sitting and watching others, the polideportivos have open spaces. For some activities, like basketball, you may need to reserve ahead, but if nobody is using the court, go ahead and shoot a few hoops. Unless there is a game in progress or a track meet, the track is yours to walk, jog, or run. Some of the larger polideportivos have tennis courts, exercise equipment, and areas for skateboards or roller skates. And you do not need to live in the canton to use its polideportivo!

Other facilities have swimming pools available for reasonable fees. They may have some requirements such as swimming caps and goggles, but if you like to swim laps in an Olympic-size pool, check it out. Fees are by the month (they differ from canton to canton);





Alajuelas's 50-meter pool is ₡13,000 a month for twice-a-week swims, half price for older adults.

San Jose has several parks with a variety equipment for exercising. The biggest and most well-known is La Sabana, which on Sundays is a beehive of sports, aerobics, kite flying, skating, and demonstrations of gymnastics or other sports. It has a lot to offer any day. Plaza Viquez, in the heart of the city, is another busy site.

So now that pandemic restrictions have been relaxed, it's time to get out and start exploring this beautiful country again. And maybe, if the confinement of the past months has added a few pounds to your figure, a polideportivo is the ideal place to start.

It isn't always easy finding your canton's polideportivo as they go under different names, such as Comité de Deportes or Comité Cantonal, but it is worth the effort if you like fresh air and exercise.

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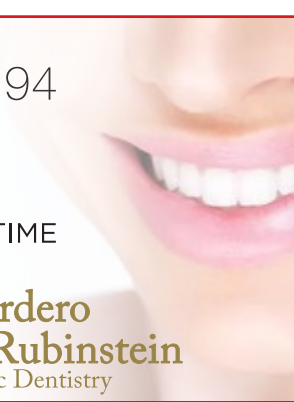
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MONTEVERDE MOMENTS

by Marshall Cobb



Pink Around the Edges

After a calamity-filled two years in the “Great White North,” Marshall Cobb and his family returned to their home in Monteverde to resume their Pura Vida life. However, COVID -19 and teenage boys do not always mean tranquility, as he relates in the following story. - Ed

As is so often the case when Bride #1 leaves town for a short trip, school was called off. There was no earthquake or water outage. No, it was – of course – COVID. The school had been ordered closed by the authorities for a day of what was termed a “deep cleaning” in light of the numerous cases of COVID amongst the students and staff.

Son #2 and I spent the morning with me at the only location that compels schoolwork: the dining room table. Son #1

happily barricaded himself in his room and promised to come out for lunch, or maybe dinner. After several hours of only somewhat painful interactions, Son #2 declared himself done. He was ready to take on things infinitely more interesting than social studies. Things like fermentation.

I repeatedly checked emails that night and the following morning, and there was nothing from the school. It, like the house in the movie Poltergeist, was clean. They could return to classes.

I brewed a full pot of coffee. I planned on drinking at least twice my normal dosage throughout the day as I wrote, did chores, and picked the dirt out of my belly button. I would be alone for seven or eight hours. It was going to be glorious.

That morning, anticipating another day of no school and glorious hours spent pursuing fermentation, or some such thing, Son #2 came bouncing down the stairs. His mood matched mine. Son #1 came down shortly thereafter. With his oversized headphones squeezing his equally oversized hair to his head, it's hard to judge his moods, but he was definitely not as giddy as Son #2 or me.

Trying not to seem too happy, I motioned for him to take his headphones off and announced, "Gentlemen, eat something, and then I'll drive you to school."

Son #2's head spun around. "What? No! No, school's closed!"

I shook my head. "Apparently, it's clean. You go back today."

Son #1 shook his head, put his headphones back on, and went for the coffee. Very rules-oriented and not generally keen on showing excess emotion, he resigned himself to his fate. Son #2, however, had different ideas. "My throat! It's like it's on fire! There's no way I can go to school. I probably have COVID!"

"You don't have COVID. You were fine until I said you had to go to school."

Opening his mouth wide, he bellowed, "Look at it!"

I nervously approached, fully aware that he had not brushed his teeth since the night before, if then.

"I can't see anything."

Tongue extended for maximum viewing, Son #2 directed me to get a flashlight. I did. It was still a smelly situation, and there might have been some gunk towards the back of his throat.

"I think you're fine."

"You're just going to send me to school with COVID? You don't care that I'm going to give everyone COVID?"

"My face was two inches from your mouth. If anyone has COVID, it's probably me," I replied.

My attempt at humor went nowhere. Son #2 asked – no, demanded – to receive a home test for COVID. With the prospect of more school-less days, Son #1

even became interested. No one looks forward to being forced to stay in his room for a week like Son #1.

I called Bride #1 and relayed the news. She guided me to the spot where our last home test resided. She also wished me luck, but it didn't sound genuine. It sounded more like relief that she was a couple thousand miles away.

A few minutes later, Son #2 and I sat at the kitchen counter while I tried to find a version of the instructions in English. I laid out the small number of components to the test, including the giant Q-tip, and Son #2 pounced on my technique.

"That's it. The whole thing is contaminated! It doesn't matter what the results will say. You've ruined it!"

I wanted the judge to sustain my objection to this vicious attack on my character, then remembered that she was out of town.

"It's not contaminated. It's fine."

"It's not fine. You contaminated it when you touched the end."

"I didn't touch the end."

Son #2 sprang up and began pacing and muttering. Eventually I got him back to the counter, where he insisted in being the one to shove the giant Q-tip up his nostril. Fairly certain that I would've been accused of doing it incorrectly, I agreed.

Ten minutes later, we stared at the COVID version of a pregnancy test stick.

"You don't have COVID," I declared.

Son #2 squinted. "I might have COVID."

"Per the test you demanded, you do not have COVID."

"But my throat really hurts."

"Allergies."

"You're making that up," Son #2 huffed.

"Well, whatever you have, it didn't bother you until you had to go to school."

Son #2 leaned closer, staring at the clear, blue stripe. "If you look at the edges you can see it's a little bit pink."

Son #1 dislodged one earphone and also leaned in. "Yeah, it does look a little pink around the edges."

"You mean, at the very edge of the testing strip, around the clear blue line running across the middle?"

"Yeah, that," they both agreed.

"Get your things. You're going to school."


Son #2 struck a belligerent tone. "I'm just going to tell them I have COVID."

"Great. You do that. I'll come pick you up, and we'll spend the morning at the public clinic. They'll give you the same test. It will also be negative, but your school won't let you back in, just in case, and you'll be stuck at the dining room table for a week. No video games. No fermentation. Just you, me, and your homework."

Son #2 froze. I almost thought he muttered "Well played!" but that might have been me talking to myself.


A few minutes later, backpacks mounted, teeth theoretically brushed, and emotions still running quite high, we passed by the COVID testing stick still sitting on the counter. This time Son #2 muttered, "... It still looks a little pink around the edges."

Post mortem: No one had COVID. Son #2 was mad at me for about two days. Bride #1 eventually returned and order was restored. And so it goes.



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A DAY IN THE LIFE

by Allen Dickinson



The Unwritten Language of Horn Blowing

Yeah, this is a rerun. But every couple of years (when I can't think of anything new and interesting to write about), I like to give those who haven't been here long, and who may be struggling to learn Spanish and understand the culture, a glimpse into some of the unwritten communications that Ticos use. Every nationality has different gestures and signals they use to "speak" with each other, and Costa Rica is no different; there's a whole language our hosts use to communicate with each other when driving. Hopefully this will take some of the mystery out of what you have heard but have not been able to interpret. But then again – well – read on.

I have previously written in this column about how to interpret the meaning behind the headlight flashing and turn-signals Tico car and bus drivers use. In this column, I want to say something about the etiquette of horn blowing according to Costa Rican vehicle operators' standards.

Basically, there are three types of horn blowing that will be encountered. But first, a side note for those new to driving in Costa Rica: The occurrence of horn blowing has drastically reduced over the past decade. So for those who find the current rate of honking excessive, be grateful you weren't here ten years ago!

The reduction has made the horn signals Ticos use much easier to decipher. Here are the three basic types:

Type 1: A single, brief (half-second) honk.

Type 2: A double honk comprised of two single beeps, also usually of short duration.

Type 3: A prolonged blast of two (or more) seconds in duration.

What do they mean? Here's a key:

Type 1 - The single, short beep is often heard from behind while at a stop light. It's generally a polite signal to the car(s) ahead that the light changed nanoseconds ago and that some less-attentive driver(s) between the person honking and the light should "wake up and get moving – now!"

Or it could be a polite "thank you" for something. More about that later in Type 2.

Type 2 - The short double beep can be confusing because it's often used to communicate different messages in different situations. For instance, it could be a simple "hello" being passed to a friend or acquaintance walking or driving by.

Or it could be someone asking for permission to enter or cross a stopped or slow-moving traffic stream (often answered by an equally short double toot granting the request).

Or it could be a "thank you!" from a driver who was allowed to make the requested entry into the traffic stream (a friendly wave of the hand is an acceptable substitute for the "thank you" honks).

Or in the case of faster moving traffic, it can be a warning: "I am coming through and look out because I'm not slowing down for you!"

Or, in other situations, it can mean that the driver making the signal is saying, "I have a newer/more expensive vehicle than you and therefore I have priority over your older/cheaper/low-class vehicle, so you should get out of my way!"

Type 2-A - In cases where the double klaxon sound is coming from a taxi, it could be that the driver is signaling a pedestrian saying, "Estoy libre! (I'm free!) Do you need a ride?"

Or if the object is a pretty female pedestrian, it could be the driver (taxi or otherwise) is communicating that they find the woman attractive and are offering her a possible ride, a relationship, and to father her children.

Or it may mean, "Hey, I know you. Do you need a ride? If so, I'll stop right here in traffic so you can get in." This can result in a Type 3 honk (discussed later) from other drivers.

Type 2-B - Motorcycle riders also use their horns to communicate with other drivers. Most often it is to simply say, "I am riding in your blind spot and at some unannounced time I am going to come around you (to the right or left side), so don't run over me."

See, that's not so confusing, is it? OK – a little – but you'll adapt.

Note that the duration of both kinds of signals described as Types 1, 2, 2-A, and 2-B can vary in length. One should be aware that if one of these honks is repeated and is a bit longer it is showing aggravation. This sometimes happens in a stalled traffic situation, whereby honking at someone is declaring that they think that all the vehicles preceding them should get out of their way and thereby disappear the traffic blockage so they can go about their business. This usually does not work.

Type 3 - The meaning of Type 3 is much easier to determine. The message being conveyed by the long (two seconds or longer) blast is: "YOU-ARE-AN-IDIOT! -for trying-that-stupid/dangerous/selfish/inconsiderate-maneuver-you-just-made-and-next-time-I'm-not-going-to-stop-and-we'll-just-have-a-collision-and-I-will-ruin-your-life-and-the-lives-of-your-family-including-your-yet-to-be-born-children-and-you-will-pay-me-for-the-damage! Have a nice day!"

Obvious, no?

One might wonder, as I have, how Ticos can generate virtually instantaneous horn-blowing actions (see "nanoseconds" in Type 1, above). The secret is that many drive with both hands on the wheel with a finger or thumb perpetually poised over the horn button, ready to signal to others around them at a moment's notice. The attitude is that you never know when someone else needs notification of their stupidity/my importance.

From this you can understand why one of the requirements for a vehicle to pass the annual Riteve vehicle inspection is to have a working horn; not having one is cause for failing the inspection. It doesn't matter if the original horn button on the steering wheel is no longer functional. A substitute button placed somewhere approximately within the driver's reach is fine – it just has to activate the horn.

As I said earlier, the frequency of horn blowing in traffic has reduced significantly over the past few years. No longer, well, less frequently, do you have to decipher if the honker is saying something like, “I-was-not-ready-for-the-turn-across-lanes-you-just-made-and-it-caused-me-to-mis-select-the-radio-station-I-was-trying-to-tune-in-so-don’t-do-that-again,” or, “It’s only a red light – go ahead, I would.”

Finally, the key to reducing the stress from excessive (by expat standards) Type 1 and Type 2 horn blowing is to recognize that many of those bleats and blats are probably not directed at you or that it is simply someone expressing their displeasure without expecting anything to change. In most cases, the prudent expat driver may ignore the signals and go on driving as they were before.

So, wasn’t that easy? Now you can drive with the confidence of knowing you know the code. (Oh, and by the way, these definitions are only generalizations and may or may not ever apply, in which case the prudent driver must be flexible.)

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Email: costarica.consulate@fco.gov.uk

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Hectares × 2.47 = Acres

Kilometers × .62 = Miles

Centigrade × 1.8 + 32 = Fahrenheit

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(These are APPROXIMATE factors, NOT EXACT.)

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FROM THE EMBASSIES



ASK ACS

Absentee Voting

Q. Can I vote absentee?

A. You can vote absentee in any election for federal office if you are a U.S. citizen, 18 years or older, and residing outside of the United States.

Q. If I do not maintain a legal residence in the United States, what is my “legal state of residence”?

A. Your “legal state of residence” for voting purposes is the state or territory where you last resided immediately prior to your departure from the United States. This applies to overseas citizens even though you may not have property or other ties in your last state of residence and your intent to return to that state may be uncertain. When completing block 7 of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request, be sure to enter the entire mailing address of your last residence. That address determines your proper voting jurisdiction.

Q. How do I register to vote, or apply for an absentee ballot?

A. You may register and request an absentee ballot with a single form, the Federal Post Card Application. This application form is accepted by all states and territories and is postage-paid in the U.S. mail, including the Military Postal System and State Department Pouch mail. Hard copies of the form can be obtained from a U.S. Embassy or Consulate or requested directly from the Federal Voting Assistance Program. An online version of the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form is also available. Please visit <https://www.fvap.gov> for complete online voter information and forms. The online version of the form must be mailed in an envelope with proper postage or mailed using our prepaid return envelope. Your Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form must be completed, printed, signed, dated, and mailed directly to your local election official.

Q. Can I register or vote in-person at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate?

A. There are no provisions for in-person voting or on-site registration at U.S. Embassies or Consulates. If you come to the U.S. Embassy on Election Day to vote, your vote will not be counted. We recommend that you register to vote/request an absentee ballot in January of each year, or at least 90 days before Election Day. U.S. Embassy and Consular officials can assist U.S. citizens in completing the Voter Registration/Absentee Ballot Request form or other election materials for their state, witness election materials (if required), and provide other absentee voting information. You may mail election materials from U.S. Embassies and Consulates. Remember to make sure that all election material is postmarked.

Q. Can I vote online, or can I drop off paper voting forms or ballots at the U.S. Embassy?

A. Some states allow you to return your completed ballot electronically, and others do not. If your state requires you to return paper voting forms or ballots to local election officials, you can do so free of charge at the U.S. Embassy. Place your ballots in postage-paid return envelopes or in envelopes bearing sufficient domestic U.S. postage and address them to the relevant local election officials. You can drop off your completed voting forms and ballots, addressed to your local election officials, during the hours of 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding Costa Rican and U.S. holidays. A drop box is located for quick drop off in the guard booth at the main pedestrian entrance to the U.S. Embassy. Please bring your valid passport if you would like to speak with a voting assistance officer in American Citizens Services. Normal transit time from Costa Rica to the United States is 10 to 15 days. If it's more convenient for you, you can also return your FPCA or ballot to your local election officials via international mail or professional courier service at your own expense.





As residents, we know the pleasure of welcoming visiting friends and relatives to experience the paradise that is Costa Rica. Most visits are trouble free, but occasionally things go wrong, and both tourists and residents can become victims of crime.

A type of crime that has attracted a lot of attention recently is sexual assault, sometimes accompanied by drink-spiking. This is never the victim's fault, but it is always sensible to be aware of the possibility of drink-spiking and to stay alert, not accepting drinks from strangers or leaving them unattended.

In the event that someone is sexually assaulted, it is helpful to understand how to report the crime and to seek help. The OIJ (detective police) deal with crimes like this, and they have the skills and experience to manage such cases properly, working under the direction of the fiscalia (the prosecutor's department) to gather evidence and to prosecute the offender.

It would be equally important to seek medical assistance, even if a victim doesn't wish to pursue a legal remedy, to rule out any potential health issues and look for forensic traces of the offender. Some people are put off this process because they have heard that medical services are obliged to report these incidents to the police. This is true, but the victim is not obliged to support a prosecution, a fact that the police will usually respect, unless the victim is a minor or has some other incapacity.

Additionally, police nowadays are becoming more aware of the need to keep the process victim-focussed and avoid multiple interviews and distressing examinations. If the victim feels this is happening, they could seek support from a friend or relative to help challenge this and look for other options.

The British Embassy is always willing to support and advocate for our citizens who are experiencing this issue. Call us 24/7 on the main Embassy number – 2258-2025 – and select the option for Consular Support. You will always be connected to a 'live' consular officer, not a recorded message.

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LEGAL UPDATE

by Rómulo Pacheco

What Happens if I Die in Costa Rica?

Over the years, I have had many inquiries regarding people who die in Costa Rica without a Costa Rican last will and testament. There are two possible scenarios that might apply, and herein I will give some information on the process required to resolve that situation in favor of the legal heirs.

Scenario One:

The deceased has a last will and testament in his/her country of origin. In that case the situation is complicated. To be applicable in Costa Rica, the will from the deceased's country of origin must contain a list of Costa Rican assets, or all assets in general, and designate their distribution. It must have been notarized in the country of origin and must also be apostilled (certified). If the document is originating from a non-Haig-agreement country, it must be notarized, certified by the Costa Rican Consulate, and apostilled. Following that, the heirs are required to travel to Costa Rica at least once to name a representative (usually an attorney) and give them the power of attorney to look after the process for them.

Once all the heirs are represented, a petition can be filed with the Costa Rican Supreme Court to allow the foreign will to take effect in Costa Rica and to ask the court for an executor. Included with the petition must be an official Spanish translation of the will, along with the original apostilled document. This procedure allows the heirs to have the will validated for the probate process in Costa Rica. It can take from six months to one year before the will becomes available for probate. Once this procedure is completed, the heirs can hire a local attorney, if they have not already done so, to be the executor, who will complete the probate procedure for them.

To accomplish the probate procedure, there are two possibilities:

- 1) If there are no heirs under the age of 18, then the probate can be accomplished by a notary and will take about four to six months to be completed. (That is, if there are no disputes among the heirs.)
- 2) If there are no disputes, the probate will be processed by a civil court. This can take one to two years to complete. (This is a best-case time estimate.)

Scenario Two:

What happens if a person dies here and there is no will at all? In that case, the Civil Code of Costa Rica lists the requirements that have to be completed in order to make this lengthy process move along until it is finally done, two to three years in the future. According to the Civil Code, the first requirement is determining who the heirs to the deceased are. To determine the heirs, Article 571 contains a list that needs to be followed, to the dot!

Costa Rica law asserts that there are two classes of heirs to a will: first degree and second degree. First degree heirs will be children, father, mother, and wife/husband or life partner (under Costa Rican law this includes homosexual couples) with no limitations to being married, and that have lived together for at least three consecutive years. Where the survivor is a wife, husband, or life partner, the amount of the inheritance they will receive will be one half of the assets accumulated during the period of the marriage. The other half of the inheritance will be distributed to the children and the parents. Children must demonstrate that they are, in fact, heirs by presenting the court with a certificate of their birth. Parents are required to present certifications of their birth, and of the birth of the deceased, to prove they are the parents.

In the event the parents of the deceased are also dead, brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews of the deceased can become second degree heirs and claim the part

of the inheritance that was originally allocated for the parents. To accomplish that, they must submit documents attesting to the parents' deaths. If that document is not from the Costa Rica Civil Registry, properly apostilled certificates of the death must be obtained and submitted.

If the estate of the deceased contains assets obtained and held prior to the marriage, they are distributed differently. A qualified attorney should be consulted in this situation. In any case, before the court can render a determination, a certificate of the death of the deceased must be provided. If the death happened outside of Costa Rica, there must be a certificate of death from the other country, fully translated and apostilled.

Costa Rican inheritance laws are complex, and all of these steps have to occur to be able to comply with the minimum requirements to install a board of heirs that can approve an inventory of the estate and to accept and nominate an executor for the estate.

My goal here is not to itemize each and every detail. My intention with this article is to give you an idea of the type of extensive and complicated procedures that exist here,

and to emphatically urge you to please make a last will and testament in Costa Rica, for your Costa Rican assets at least. The probate of a Costa Rican will can take from three to five months to process, whereas it can take two to three years and many, many dollars, to complete the probate if there is no will. Because the process is complicated, it should be placed in the hands of a good attorney. It will save the heirs a lot of time, effort, and money.

For more information, please contact me:

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THE SOUTHERN ZONE

by Sheelagh Richards



The DONATAPA Project - a Big Winner

Recycling is undeniably virtuous. When we see tons of plastic swirling in the oceans, we know something needs to be done, but what and by whom? I remember when the UK started recycling paper in the 1980s I regularly carted loads of newspapers and packaging to the local center. But then we heard much of it was going to a landfill; the volume of paper being recycled exceeded the needs of businesses using it. Thus we realized recycling is only successful if there is an end or “make” facility that turns the waste into something beneficial.

On that score, the DONATAPA project is a winning concept. Hard plastic ‘tapas’ (tops) are collected and sent to a company, IPP, in Alajuela. There they are transformed into plastic “wooden” bars which are linked together to form pathways that enable people with mobility challenges to have access to the wonderful beaches in Costa Rica. The plastic tops are kept out of landfill – a win for the environment. The pathways enable older and

disabled people to enjoy the seaside with their families – a win for equality of opportunity for an often neglected 15% of society. An additional benefit is that when the tops are removed from the bottles before discarding them, it takes 30% less energy to compress them – a win for the reduction of emissions.

The “Equal Opportunities Law for People with Disabilities” was enacted by the Costa Rican Congress in May 1996. Perhaps that was late in the day in comparison to many other countries, but getting equality right across the whole spectrum of access to buildings, education, employment, public services, and social opportunities is a huge challenge. DONATAPA exemplifies another win for Costa Rica.

The DONATAPA project is sponsored by the Costa Rican Accessible Tourism Network, an organization inspired by Stephanie Sheehy and Emilio Zúñiga, the owners of Viaggio Travel in Escazú. When traveling with

aged relatives, they experienced firsthand the obstacles facing disabled holidaymakers, whether Costa Rican citizens or tourists from abroad. They sought a solution, and the Network now sets standards and supports the tourism industry in meeting the aspirations of the equal access legislation.

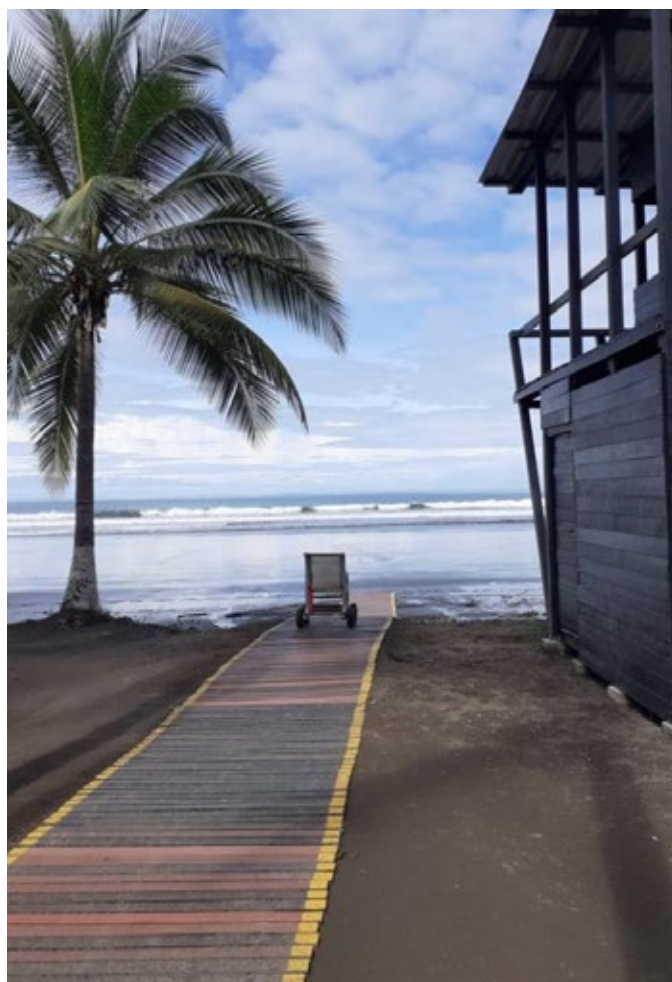
Thankfully, they didn't stop at the accessible toilets point, as is so often the case. Hearing of the DONATAPA pathways, my niece checked out the glorious beaches on the Queensland Gold Coast: toilets, yes, but not a pathway in sight. Bravo, Costa Rica!

I was very proud that the Pérez Zeledón International Women's Club (PZWIC) kicked off the project in San Isidro del General in 2019. Our biggest challenge was getting a collection point and a partner who would deliver the tops to Alajuela. Our first deal fell through, but we now have the perfect partnership with our municipality. Working with us enables them to earn brownie points in meeting the government's demands that all local authorities up their recycling game – a win of them and a win for us.

How to get going? Ideally schools or development associations could act as the center point in getting collections going in every local community and persuade their municipality to provide the central collection point and transportation. In a huge canton where local collaboration is hard to achieve, we've settled for finding local champions (such as a school, a pulperia, a tourist provider, or even the local water authority) to get the project going, with the hope that other community groups or locations will join in. We give these partners a laminated poster to display, which they do with pride.

Poco a poco, the message spreads. One little chap went off and spoke to his school director, who got the three schools on his hillside working together. All small successes!

The pandemic kicked PZWIC into the long grass for a while, but we were delighted to have a re-launch last October when San Isidro the farmers market joined us as partners. With an attendance of more than 2,500 customers a week and farmers coming from miles around, that was a huge triumph. Now schools are opening again, and we're hoping the local Ministry of Education office will follow up its promise to link DONATAPA with the Blue Flag program; educate the kids, and they educate the adults. And the municipality wants to work with us to get some competitions going, get more businesses involved and increase publicity – all good stuff.



The first pathway was installed at Jacó beach in March 2018. There are now 11, seven achieved by DONATAPA and four by other voluntary or private initiatives.

I love playing with the statistics, if only to come up with fun facts for young people. Guess how many tops it took to make the walkway and how much they weigh?

The pathway is 60 meters long, comprised of 20 panels, each 1.5m x 3m and weighing 64 kilos. If we assume an average of 350 tops weighing one kilo, the Jacó pathway used 46,000 tops. It is mind-boggling, isn't it!

These facts allow me to end with a tribute to the wonderful volunteers who put out and bring in these pathways in tune with the tides. European Manual Handling regulations require a risk assessment for lifting any load over 23 kilos. Costa Ricans just round up some good strong men and get on with it. They are the stars in making this project a success.

Finally, thank you, ARCR, for providing a collection point at your offices. It's a long way to go to create a whole pathway meter by meter – good luck!

THE VIEW FROM DOWNTOWN

by Michael Miller



What Will Become of Hotel Don Carlos?

The venerable Hotel Don Carlos, a fixture in the historic Barrio Amon neighborhood of San José for many years, has closed permanently and is listed for sale.

For decades, the boutique Hotel Don Carlos has been one of the great cultural treasures of downtown, overflowing with Costa Rican art: paintings, statues, stained glass, hand-painted tiles, fountains, decorative wrought iron, wooden wheels of oxen carts, and more. In its heyday, the hotel was popular with visitors, as well as with Ticos who were proud to show off the finer side of Costa Rica's

culture. It had a nice cafe and a lovely gift shop, and since much of the art was in the common areas of the hotel, you could always view this astonishing collection for free.

The Hotel Don Carlos closed in 2020, and the property was listed for sale. Walls that once displayed a huge collection of Costa Rican art are now bare. The only pieces that remain are those that are attached to the building, such as a fountain and the stained-glass windows.

One could say that it was a victim of the COVID-19 virus, but it might be more accurate to say that it was a victim of the reaction of the Costa Rican government to the virus.

Officials shut down most of the flights into the country for more than half a year and then, when visitors were allowed to trickle in, expensive insurance policies and onerous health passes were required for each tourist. The restrictions had a devastating effect on tourism.

Whatever the cause, the national treasure that was once Hotel Don Carlos is no more. On April 8 and 9, 2022, hundreds of paintings and other art objects that had adorned the hotel were moved to a large garage across Avenida 9 and offered for sale to the public. The sales event was timed to coincide with the Amon Cultural Festival, being held the same weekend. Many of the paintings and other unique works of art, once part of the art at the hotel, were sold.

The sale was overseen by Doña Lupita Balser de Weiler, the matriarch of the family who owns the property. Doña Lupita is the daughter of the founder of the hotel and has been its managing director for many years.

It is impossible to know what the future will bring for Hotel Don Carlos. It was created in the 1940s by connecting three separate houses. Now, one of those houses has already been demolished; the owners felt that it had structural problems that could not profitably be repaired.

The remaining property is for sale, and the asking price is \$3 million USD. But even if a new owner reopens the location as a hotel, so much of the physical structure and the art collection is gone that it will never be able to return to the way it was.

On the days of the sale, a portion of the hotel itself was open and interested persons could enter the building and walk down the wide descending walkway where



several festival vendors had set up displays of clothing, gourmet foods, and arts and crafts.

I was allowed access to the rest of the hotel. Juan Weiler, Doña Lupita's son, was my host and guide as we looked through the building. It was sad to see the bare walls and the empty rooms. The only artworks remaining were the items attached to the walls, things like the hand-painted tile works, some bas-reliefs, and



most prominently, the famous stained-glass windows. The hotel once had a nice coffee shop and a wonderful gift shop. Now, sadly, they too are a part of history.

Pointing out some features of the huge hand-painted tile artwork attached to the building, Sr. Weiler expressed his hope that the existing hotel will continue to have some value for the family, and for the community, until a new owner takes over. With the energy and enthusiasm of youth, he tells me that he hopes to rent some of the rooms to long-term guests. He envisions the scaled-down Hotel Don Carlos as a place for yoga classes, a massuese, artists, and perhaps even a chocolate maker, while it is still owned by the family.

Hotel Don Carlos sits on the corner of Avenida 9 and Calle 9 in the center of Barrio Amon, once the most prestigious neighborhood in all of Costa Rica. Although no one knows what will become of the hotel, or what this neighborhood will look like in five years, we can only be certain that it will be very different.

I am reminded of a comment by playwright David Mamet who said, "If you visit Martha's Vineyard today, you can look all over that island and not find a single harpoon maker." He was referring to the fact that



Martha's Vineyard was once a major whaling center and that, eventually, everything changes.

*Michael Miller is the author of the popular guidebook about downtown San José, Costa Rica, titled **The Real San José**. He is also the author of the exciting new novel **Tribune Man**, a portrait of Oakland, California, a beautiful and often underrated American city, during a trying time. Both books are available on Amazon.*

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DESIGN WISE

by Shelagh Duncan



What Does the Next Level of Sleep Look Like?

Adjustable beds were once found only in hospitals, but now you can have all the comfort and health benefits of one in your own home. Most models, thankfully, look more decorative than those you would see in a hospital, so you can relax in style.

Some of the medical conditions with which an adjustable bed can help include sleep apnea, acid reflux, lower back pain, arthritis, high blood pressure, diabetes, and restless leg syndrome. Of course, there's more than just medical advantages to consider. A completely healthy person can still sleep better on an adjustable bed because of its ability to customize how they sleep.

WHAT IS AN ADJUSTABLE BED?

An adjustable bed, sometimes known as an electric bed, is a bed base topped with a series of panels. These panels can tilt, elevating the head or foot of the mattress.

So, with just the push of a button, you can silently set up your adjustable bed for customized comfort. And some will even fit inside your existing bed frame for a more stylish appearance! Because of its electronic components and high-quality metal structure, an adjustable base is one of the more expensive types of bed support, but many people find the cost worthwhile to be able to get a better night's rest.

BENEFITS OF AN ADJUSTABLE BED

An adjustable bed is commonly used to treat a variety of chronic conditions, like those mentioned above, because when you sleep on an adjustable base you can choose a variety of comfortable positions, as well as lying flat. Improved health, however, isn't the only benefit an adjustable bed offers. Some of the other gains that can be derived from sleeping in an adjustable bed include:



Reduce Snoring

It's well-known that snoring can keep a partner awake at night. If your snoring is a symptom of sleep apnea, you may feel sleepy during the day from a poor night's rest. Snoring and obstructive sleep apnea often occur when the tongue and other soft tissues fall to the back of the throat, blocking the windpipe. This happens most frequently with back sleepers. When you sleep on your side or stomach, your throat's soft tissues are more likely to stay out of the way. Or a person may snore because of congestion or asthma. Keeping the head lifted while sleeping can ease these symptoms; by raising the head, you can drain your sinuses and keep your airway clear.

Reduce Back Pain

Most of us will experience back pain at some point in our lives, up to 80 percent of us, according to the American Chiropractic Association. If your back pain feels at its worst when you stand up straight, an adjustable bed can provide some needed relief by taking the pressure off your spine as you sleep.

If you find yourself waking up with back pain, you might need to take a closer look at your mattress. An old mattress that's lost its support is a common cause of morning back pain. So if you are thinking about buying a new one, you might want to try a

medium-firm mattress, since a sleep health study in 2015 found that it was the best firmness for maintaining spine alignment.

Keep Your Stomach Settled

Gastroesophageal reflux (GERD) occurs when the contents of the stomach come rushing back up the esophagus. When the stomach acid touches the lining of the throat, it causes heartburn (a painful, burning feeling in the middle of the chest). GERD is known to affect about 20 percent of the population, and an adjustable bed can raise your upper body and let gravity do most of the work in settling your stomach.

Better Blood Circulation and Reduced Swelling

Do you have varicose veins causing you pain or swollen legs and feet? An adjustable bed can improve blood flow and reduce leg swelling by elevating your legs. When you raise a leg so that it's higher than the heart, gravity will prevent too much blood from pooling in the lower leg, improving blood flow to the rest of the body.

Legs may also swell because of edema, which is when excess fluid is trapped in the body tissue. Edema is common among pregnant women, although it can also be caused by a serious medical condition such as kidney disease or congestive heart failure. Raising your leg with an adjustable base can relieve the swelling.

An adjustable bed can also improve blood flow, easing the symptoms and conditions associated with poor circulation. If you have high blood pressure, diabetes, or even restless leg syndrome, an adjustable bed can help you get a good night's sleep.

Soothe Arthritis Symptoms

It is not uncommon for those with osteoarthritis, the most common type of arthritis, to wake up with stiff and sore joints. An adjustable bed can help relieve pressure and support inflamed joints. If you find it challenging to move your body because of your



arthritis, making it harder to get up in the morning, an adjustable bed can help you sit up, making it easier to pivot your body and get out of bed.

Relaxation

With an adjustable bed, you can relax more before falling asleep. Instead of just lying on a flat mattress, you can raise the head of the bed so that it mimics a recliner chair. You can watch TV, use your laptop, read, or just relax in the comfort of your bed. Split bases also allow couples to adjust their personal settings on one side, without disturbing their partner.

Fall Asleep Faster

Many of us have had a bad night where we just couldn't get comfortable. Perhaps your normal sleeping position just didn't feel right, or maybe your pillow wasn't at a good angle. An adjustable frame gives you the freedom to experiment and find the perfect position for falling asleep.

Sleepers often love the zero-gravity position, which elevates their legs above their heart and slightly raises the head. An adjustable bed allows resting in the zero-gravity position, which can reduce strain on the legs and lower back. Often, this lack of pressure leaves a person feeling more refreshed in the morning.

FINDING THE RIGHT MATTRESS FOR AN ADJUSTABLE BED BASE

When you pick out an adjustable base, you're only halfway done with your shopping. You might want to consider whether you need a new mattress, since not every mattress works well with an adjustable base. The best mattress for an adjustable bed adapts with the base's movements and remains comfortable no matter how it is positioned.

When deciding on mattress, the first point for consideration is the type of mattress you have. Memory foam or latex mattresses are excellent choices, as are hybrid ones, since their pocketed coils allow them to move with the bed frame without reducing the mattress's comfort. A traditional mattress with inner-spring coils, however, is often not the right mattress for an adjustable bed frame; the coil setup usually cannot flex with the base's panels, and trying to angle it can damage it.

After you've picked out the right mattress material, you need to ask yourself if it's the right firmness for you. A firm mattress can be just as flexible as a softer one, but it might not be the most comfortable choice for you. When considering firmness, a side sleeper should have mattress with a soft to medium feel, while a mattress for a back or stomach sleeper should have a medium-firm to firm feel. If you're a combination sleeper who switches between two or all three styles, look for a medium feel mattress.

The final point to consider is the mattress's thickness. It is usually preferable to keep the thickness under 14 inches as it may be too thick to adjust with an electric frame.

Mattresses under ten inches are not recommended, mainly for quality reasons. Thinner mattresses tend to wear out more quickly because they have less material to withstand wear and tear, and a too-thin mattress provides insufficient support, so you're more likely to find yourself waking up with a sore back or neck pain.

In summary, an adjustable bed can offer many health benefits. Even if you have no health issues, an adjustable base can provide you with the better sleep you need to have a good day. The right mattress is an essential part of getting a good night's sleep, and you can't reap the full benefits of adjustable beds if you're sleeping on a worn-out and unsupportive mattress. Elevate your sleep, and feel the difference!

Wishing you sweet dreams – and improved health!

Until next time,

Shelagh Duncan

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PARADISE, WE HAVE A PROBLEM

by Tony Johnson

"I Can't KEEP No Sa... tis... fac... tion"

With Apologies to the Rolling Stones

Like yoga and meditation, "happiness" has become a movement, an industry. Not only is there abundant happiness advice on YouTube and Facebook, but many happiness coaches also offer their services. Hundreds of research papers have been written on the topic, and a university has even inaugurated a master's degree in happiness. Some 200 other colleges also provide courses on the subject. One web program offering training in happiness coaching indicates that happiness is a billion-dollar industry. You may have even seen the occasional article on happiness here in *El Residente* magazine too.

In spite of the modern commercial and scientific interest, happiness continues to involve two historical challenges: attaining it and retaining it. Everyone knows ways to feel happy; think of the happiness that you enjoyed this past week. Making it last, however, is usually more difficult and frustrating. Why? Many reasons. But I'll focus on two: psychology and biology.

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF HAPPINESS

It's natural for us to seek a restored, lasting level of happiness when we feel down. We don't expect it to return automatically on its own, so we make changes, solve problems, relieve stress, and improve things, expecting our happiness to be restored. Just the anticipation of things getting better boosts our mood, increases excitement and optimism, and makes us happier. But our fantasy of finally arriving at a permanent "promised land" of happiness overlooks the reality that we inevitably get used to everything. No matter how great it might be, we forget that nothing can remain new or continually satisfying, and eventually everything loses its novelty and exciting quality and becomes routine, even happiness. After a brief high, we dip down to a sort of set point, our normal state of satisfaction. Many find this normal

level of happiness to be disappointing, so they attempt to restore that lost high and experience an intense positive feeling again. And again.

This is called the "hedonic treadmill." Being stuck indoors by the rain, for example, our happiness subsides. We imagine the conditions that will make us feel better, like a good band at the cantina tonight. We then head out for some fun and restored happiness. While there, we're enjoying the show and we feel cheerful again, but upon returning home we soon feel down again and then seek more happy experiences. Despite our efforts, our ups and downs sometimes leave us feeling like we're running in place, able to feel better, but really getting nowhere permanent since we always lose that initial high. The new always gets old, the excitement always wears off, things become mundane, happiness subsides.

The reality of change is a key explanation. If our happiness depends on certain conditions remaining unchanged, the one thing we can count on is those conditions will change and our happiness will decline. Change impacts our happiness by shifting our focus from what's good about our life to what demands attention to what's difficult and discouraging, so our happiness declines or disappears. But, typically, we don't factor that change into our happiness plan, and we retain the dream of permanence, setting ourselves up for disappointment. We don't expect a meal to permanently solve the problem of hunger, so we're not let down when we become hungry again. But with happiness, we expect it to somehow last forever.

Another part of the problem comes from a mistaken understanding of the nature of happiness. Many of us assume that happiness only refers to a high level of excitement: exhilaration, ecstasy, joy. Like kids turned loose at recess. Anything less intense is considered

inadequate, merely OK, something to rise above, not to settle for. Minimizing this calmer type of happiness, we often consider the peaks as the only real happiness. Our joy would be more stable if we accept happiness as changing, covering a range of feelings and appreciate any level we achieve.

Moreover, we need to ask if we could actually function and have the energy to live at a constant peak of exhilaration? Is it possible and desirable? Or would we exhaust ourselves? And where would we go emotionally if we're living daily at our peak and then something especially wonderful happens? How could we top always being at the top? It would be strenuous. And limiting.

You might say, "If we're at the top, why would we need to go higher? We've arrived at our ultimate destination. Life is perfect." But would such arrival help survival? Would we actually stop eating after the best meal of our life? We need the discomfort of hunger to motivate us to satisfy our ongoing need for nourishment or we would starve. Likewise, we need a renewed desire for happiness to motivate us to adapt to changing conditions, to motivate us to improve the quality of our life and our chances for survival.

The source of our fleeting higher happiness, then, is our unrealistic expectation that improvements can make a lasting increase in our happiness, that we can reach and stay at some Nobel Prize stratum of happiness. This ignores our innate tendency to adapt to changes and return to our genetically programmed contentment, our satisfaction.

We often expect one big change to bring about a lasting solution to all the ongoing problems of life. "It'll be perfect. We'll be happy from now on." In our dream version of Costa Rica, there are no problems, just a permanent vacation of exciting, satisfying experiences. By moving here, there will be no mundane life maintenance chores or disappointments; life will all be fabulous, not just OK. Is that possible?

In the unlikely circumstance that our new life in Costa Rica turned out like that, the unhappy news is that we'd get used to it. The initial high would evaporate, and our happiness set point would be restored. Why? Because we humans are programmed to constantly adapt to changing circumstances, and greater happiness is the temporary reward for that effort. When we adapt, we make life better – for now.

There are also some down sides to a constant pursuit of more and better that need to be considered. One is that when

we're always looking elsewhere we never fully appreciate what we have here and now. As a result, our attitudes convert the current good into the "not good enough." In other words, when we're only looking to the future for happiness, we neglect the happiness in the now. When we believe that only the high of some new situation is good enough and that what we have now is inadequate, deficient, compared to some idealized, impossible future, we reduce our actual happiness. Can you see what impact such a not-good-enough mindset will have on even a high level of happiness?

Are we then doomed to run on the treadmill of life chasing ever higher joy while getting nowhere permanent? No, not if we are realistic about how happiness works and appreciate a more attainable, sustainable, and realistic notion of happiness. When we adopt that attitude, feeling down, we know we can feel happy again and can enjoy prolonged, but not permanent, periods of satisfaction or peace. And peace is nothing to sneer at!

THE BIOLOGY OF HAPPINESS

We tend to think happiness as strictly an emotional, psychological thing, but that's incorrect; there's a biological basis for the presence and transience of happiness. Recall that we are, after all, biochemical mechanisms and that our feelings have a biochemical basis. We feel good because our hormones, our biochemistry, make us feel good. Chocolate, great food, alcohol, drugs, and even love are not the direct source of good feelings. They make us feel good because they stimulate our biochemical reward system. The actual basis of the good feeling is not the chocolate we eat but the neurochemistry of our programmed reward system that chocolate activates.

It's great that most of the time after a downer we return to feeling good again. No one would want to be permanently stuck in the down cycle of our emotions. Research has shown that after big setbacks most of us gradually return to the OK set point. That's adaptive. That characteristic prevents some big misfortune from totally ruining our life; we must have some calm, normal base of operations to return to after up and downs, some stable place where those hormones can be resupplied to be ready for the next episode.

But why, after some peak experience, would we want to go back to some normal? On the surface, that doesn't seem to make sense. But when we look at it more deeply, yes, it does.



Remember, that happiness is not just a psychological experience but also a biochemical process. That experience of happiness requires the discharge of biochemicals into our bodily system. For example, a magnificent sunset may greatly elevate our mood. “Wow! Look at that! I’m so lucky to be here now.” What feels good at that moment is not the sunset! We don’t feel the sunset, we feel the impact of the biochemicals that the sunset triggered. We feel our natural reward system’s response to that sight.

Stay with me now. We can’t sustain that high because we eventually deplete the neurotransmitters that produced it. So we must return to some lower, resting state to restore the chemical supply that actually makes us feel good.

We must go back up after a fall because life would be unbearable if we were unable to adapt. We go back down after a high because we need to resupply the chemistry that gives us those great feelings. Those ups and downs actually keep us in an emotional, functional, stable zone of well-being.

Stable may sound boring, but it is essential. Think of a ship in a huge storm, rolling from side to side, tossed up and down. Would we want a life continuously like that? Or do we need our “ship of life” to return to its normal balance? An adaptive ship and life require a return to an even keel. We cannot enjoy well-being if we’re permanently swept to left or right, low or high, by the waves of life. We need the sea to calm and stability and peace be restored. We need a chance to rebalance and return to the game renewed, resupplied, restored. Stability gives us that.

Happiness, defined as content or satisfied, may seem rather lame. We’re seeking much more than that, aren’t we? Consider this alternate view: What we’re actually seeking is peace. We’re happy when things are where we need them to be. We’re extremely

happy when things are better than we need them to be, and that’s a kind of peace. Rather than being frustrated with reality, we see it as good enough. We don’t need to struggle to make things better. If we define happiness as being at peace, free of suffering, isn’t that what we’re seeking even at peak moments?

Certainly, when we’re at a low point, we want an elevation in our mood. We want to feel better about life, to be at peace with our life, not feeling pain about it. But when we are at a peak, do we want or need more? No! “It’s finally good enough and I am at peace with that.” Do we want or need to elevate our mood to an even higher level? Not really. Not until changes demand a new adaptation and the happiness reward to achieve

it. At peace we don't need to be somewhere else higher. Peace is good enough.

We can't keep satisfaction, if by that we mean some peak, high level of good feeling. But if being satisfied means being at peace, free of suffering, we can hold onto that, if we appreciate its benefits. And we might even discover that this is all we really need, helping us avoid the fruitless search for that one more high we believe will finally be permanent.

Imagine those happiness counselors making billions from helping people improve their life satisfaction. We know now that those counselors will eventually be disappointed as they adapt to life as billionaires because even that stratosphere of wealth cannot protect them from the novelty wearing off, problems appearing, and change relentlessly happening. Until they accept that reality, they will be unhappy again. Once they're at peace with that, they can step off the treadmill.

"The happiest people don't have the best of everything, they make the best of everything they have."

Tony Johnson is a retired university mental health therapist. He's blissfully free of any drive to make a billion, even a million. Peace is what he really seeks. johnson.tony4536@gmail.com



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CLUB CORNER

Due to COVID-19 many groups and clubs in this listing have suspended meetings. Interested persons should contact their groups to determine the status of their group. Group leaders should contact El Residente with information for this section to be updated. Clubs whose listings are not updated will be deleted from future listings.

Organizations are invited and encouraged to post their group activities, information, meeting schedules, and notices of special events FREE in the ARCR Facebook account. Go to www.facebook.com/ARCR123

► Alcoholics Anonymous

Groups meet daily throughout the country; times and places change frequently. Schedules for meetings and their locations can be found at: www.costaricaaaa.com.

► Al-Anon

English language meetings open to anyone whose life has been/is affected by someone else's problem with alcohol. Meeting information can be found at: www.costaricaaaa.com. Family Resources.

► American Legion Post 10-Escazú

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► American Legion Post 12-Golfito

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► American Legion Auxiliary

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► Amigos of Costa Rica

A US-based non-profit organization established in 1999. As an advocate for philanthropy in Costa Rica, it contributes to the well-being of Costa Rica by connecting donors resources with vetted non-profit solutions. US Government tax-payers donations are deductible. For more information go to: www.amigosofcostarica.org or email to: emily@amigosofcostarica.org.

► Atenas Bridge Club

Informal, friendly duplicate games. Classes at 11 a.m., games at 12:30 p.m. Tuesdays. New members welcome. For more information, visit the website at: www.atenasbridgeclub.com or email to: atenasbridgeclub@gmail.com.

► Birding Club Costa Rica

A private group that travels around Costa Rica to observe and identify the 900+ species of birds found here, learn about different parts of the country, and enjoy the company of like-minded and interested people. For more information, visit the website: www.birdingclubcr.org or email to: info@birdingclubcr.org.

► Canadian Club

Canadian Club welcomes everyone to join us for our monthly luncheons and at our special annual events. No passport required. There are no fees or dues to pay, just sign up with your email address and we will keep you informed of Canadian events. For information go to Facebook: Canadian Club of Costa Rica, or email Pat at: canadianclubcr@yahoo.com to sign up.

► Central Valley Golf Association

Meets every Tuesday morning between 6-7 a.m. at the Valle Del Sol golf course in Santa Ana. Both individual and two person events with different formats every week. We invite all men and woman with all handicaps to join us and enjoy golf on a picturesque course. No membership required. For more information, contact: Larry Goldman 8933-3333, email to: nylarryg@yahoo.com.

► Costa Ballena Women's Network

Begun in Ojochal with a handful of expat ladies, our focus is networking, community, business, and social activities as well as offering an opportunity to meet new people. Monthly lunch meetings held the third Saturday of each month through a variety of social activities at various restaurants with guest speakers talking on interesting topics. For more information please email: cbwn00@gmail.com.

► Costa Rica Writers Group

Published authors and writers, newbies, and wanna-bes make up this group. Dedicated to helping and improving all authors' work with resources for publishing, printing, editing, cover design; every aspect of the writing process. Third Thursday, January through November, Henry's Beach Café, Escazú, 11 a.m. Contact: bbrashears0@gmail.com or visit our Facebook page, Costa Rica Writers Group.

► Democrats Abroad Costa Rica

Provides information about voting in the US and voting issues of interest to US citizens living in Costa Rica. For more information or to join, email: democratsabroadcostarica@gmail.com or visit our website at: www.democratsabroad.org/cr Register to vote absentee at: votefromabroad.org

► Domestic Animal Welfare Group Costa Ballena

DAWG is a volunteer run, non-profit organization focused on animal advocacy in the Costa Ballena region of Costa Rica with

a goal of eliminating the abuse and abandonment of domestic animals in Costa Ballena. We stress education, spay and neuter. Donations are our lifeline. For information visit the website at: www.dawgcostarica.org or email to: dawgcostarica@gmail.com.

► First Friday Lunch

Each month on the first Friday of the month ARCR sponsors a First Friday Lunch at 12 p.m. All are invited to join ARCR officers and others for an informal lunch and BS session. No RSVP or agenda, just good food and meeting new and old friends. Attendees are responsible for their own food and drink expenses. Meetings are at the Chinese restaurant, Marisqueria Mariscos Vivo, located behind the Mas x Menos grocery store located across from the Nissan Dealer near Parque Sabana. Call ARCR (2220-0055) for directions.

► Little Theater Group

An English-speaking theater group located in Escazu. Website: littletheatregroup.org Email: info@littletheatregroup.org Whatsapp: 8708-2607

► Marine Corps League

Meets the second Saturday of the month at 11 a.m. at the Tap House in City Place Mall in Santa Ana. We are looking for new members. Former Marines and Navy Corpsmen can be regular members. All other service members are welcome to join as associate members. For information call Andy Pucek at: 8721-6636 or email: andy@marinecorpsleaguecr.com.

► Newcomers Club of Costa Rica

(For Women) The Club, in existence since 1980, promotes friendship and support among members, mostly expats in Costa Rica, through conducting a variety of social and recreational activities. Meetings are held from September to May, interest groups meet year-round. General Meeting at 10:00 a.m. every first Tuesday of the month. For more information go to our Facebook page at: <https://www.facebook.com/newcomers.org/> or email to: newcomersclub.costarica@gmail.com.

► Pérez Zeledón International Women's Club

Formed in November 2009 to promote friendship between English speaking women in Pérez Zeledón and, through friendship, to make positive contributions to our local community. The PZIWC meets for lunch on the second Tuesday of each month, hosts Ramblers Day on the third Tuesday of each month, and has a Games Day on the fourth Tuesday of each month. For more information, please send an email to: pzwomansclub@gmail.com or visit our web site at: www.pziwc.org.

► Professional Women's Network

PWN provides its members with opportunities to network with other professional women with the goal of aiding personal and professional development of entrepreneurs, students, and professionals. PWN sponsors service and outreach programs to "give back" to the community. Meeting schedules vary. For info on the speaker for the month and to register, call Helen at: 2280-

4362. Location: Tin Jo Restaurant in San José, Calle 11, Av. 6-8. Or email us at: pwn.costarica@gmail.com. PWN website is: www.pwnocr.com.

► Quepos-Manuel Antonio Writers Group

The QMAWG is a group of aspiring and accomplished writers living in the Central and South Pacific Coast area who meet to expand their skills, share resources, and support and socialize with others with an interest in writing. Meetings take place on the second Sunday of each month at 12:00 p.m. at El Avion restaurant in Manuel Antonio, and includes a presentation and Q&A session, followed by a luncheon and social exchange. For more information, email Bob Normand at: bob@bobnormand.com

► Radio Control Sailing Club

Meets at Sabana Park Lake. For information email Walter Bibb at: wwbbsurf40@yahoo.com.

► San Vito Bird Club

A community based birding/nature group centered in the diverse southern zone of Costa Rica. We also facilitate nature education to local elementary schools through Cornell University's Bird Sleuth program. Twice monthly bird walks through the Wilson Botanical Garden and other sites are open to all; binoculars available as needed. Please visit our website: www.sanvitobirdclub.org or email: eltangaral@gmail.com for more information.

► Wine Club of Costa Rica

Social group. Monthly Meeting, Mainly Escazú Email: costaricawineclub2017@gmail.com

► Women's Club of Costa Rica

The oldest, continuously operating, philanthropic organization for English-speaking women in Costa Rica. The club is focused on serving community needs, particularly on children's needs. Along with its philanthropic fundraising activities, WCCR also hosts regular lunches, teas, and many special interest groups. Guests are welcome. Information and a calendar of events can be found at: www.wccr.org.

► Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

Open to men too. Meetings in English in Heredia, Spanish in San José, and English/Spanish in San Ramon. We work on peace and human rights issues. Call Mitzi: 2433-7078 or write us at: mitzstar@gmail.com.

NOTICE: Club officers should review the contact information for their clubs and make sure it is up to date.

Send any changes or corrections to: service@arcr.cr subject line; Club Corner, and post them on the the ARCR Facebook page at: www.facebook.com/ARCR123.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

Important dates in Costa Rica:

1 May

Sunday, Labor Day,
National holiday

19 June

Sunday, Father's Day,
Observance

Funniest One Liners

I told my wife that a
husband is like a fine wine:
we just get better with age.
The next day she locked
me in the cellar.

Why does a husband lead
a dog's life? He comes
in with muddy feet, gets
comfortable by the fire, and
waits to be fed.

What's the best thing about
Switzerland? I don't know,
but the flag is a big plus.

Why did the man fall down
the well? Because he
couldn't see that well!

Hospitality: Making your
guests feel like they're at
home, even if you wish they
were.

Why do peppers make such
good archers? Because
they habanero.

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DR.
**ESTEBAN
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VARGAS**

Cod. 13230

**Medicina General y Mixta CCSS
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epv900@gmail.com

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